

At Home: I Am the Egg Man

Detroit Free Press Magazine

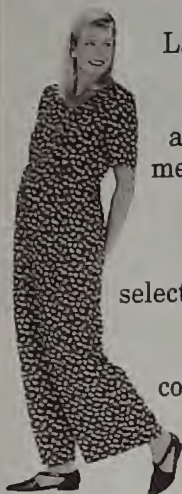
FEB. 6, 1994

THE END

Millennial mullings
as we approach
the year 2000

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Upfront

IN 1954, WHEN I WAS A TENDER LAD of
8, the Dominican sister who was our third-
grade teacher gravely informed us of the
following:

When the Virgin Mary appeared to
a group of Portuguese children in Fa-
tima in 1917, she gave them a secret
letter which was entrusted to the
pope. In 1960, the pope would read
the letter and inform the globe of its
contents. The letter, Sister said, was
thought to contain "information about
the end of the world."

That was all I needed to hear. A pes-
simist even then, I assumed that
when 1960 rolled around, the pope would take
the letter out of the envelope, solemnly peruse it,
drop to his knees and in a choked whisper say to
his personal secretary, "The Final Day is at
hand."

The thought of this scared me sick. It also
made me feel seriously cheated. Six more years?
All I had was six more years? I'd barely be in
high school when the apocalypse came calling.
I'd never have a driver's license. I'd cower with
my parents and my brother and my sister in the
terrible moment before the Great Cataclysm.
Would we all hold hands? Would it hurt a lot?
Would all five of us make it into heaven? What
rotten luck to have been born when I was.

Thereafter, a gathering cloud of doom shad-
owed every round of cops and robbers, every
cartoon matinee double feature, every Little
League game. Tick, tick, tick.

Well.

The year 1960 came and went. I never found
out what was in the pope's letter, or if he even
opened it.

By that time I was 14, and my view of the world
and its finiteness had evolved considerably. Cat-
aclysm was your mother forgetting to iron your
jeans. Apocalypse was not making the junior var-

sity basketball team. Heaven was a pretty
paying attention to you.

Life, that bushy shrub, had a way of crowding
out even the most fearsome cosmic abstractions.



Ricci

Right now, as the days inch toward
the year 2000, a lot of people find
themselves in somewhat the same sit-
uation I was in during the 1950s —
waiting for the the Big Finish. The
apocalypse, in fact, has become a
growth industry. Free Press religion
writer David Crumm points out, be-
ginning on page 10 of today's maga-
zine, that people ranging from evan-
gelical Christians to comic book

artists to intellectuals are increasingly preoccu-
pied with the end of the world or, at least, the end
of civilized life as we know it.

For some religionists, the apocalypse is an
event to be welcomed; they believe it will mark
the salvation of the righteous. For just about ev-
erybody else, however, Doomsday is the ulti-
mate downer — no more Earth, no more home
folks, no more ... me.

Maybe we should be more philosophical in
contemplating the whole concept of the End. So
far as anyone can prove, the world ends every day
for every individual who dies. Not only that, but
knowing our lives must someday be over is ulti-
mately what gives them urgency and meaning.

The point is, we might be worse off if we knew
for sure that everything would just go on forev-
er. To paraphrase Woody Allen, people yearn for
eternity who don't know what to do with them-
selves on a Sunday afternoon.

There is even a small, perverse comfort — a
sense of closure, a final making sense — in the
concept of All This being All Over one day.

All things being equal, however, I'd still rather
it didn't happen on my watch.

JAMES RICCI

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On the Cover



The year 2000 is
coming — will it be
the beginning
of the End?10

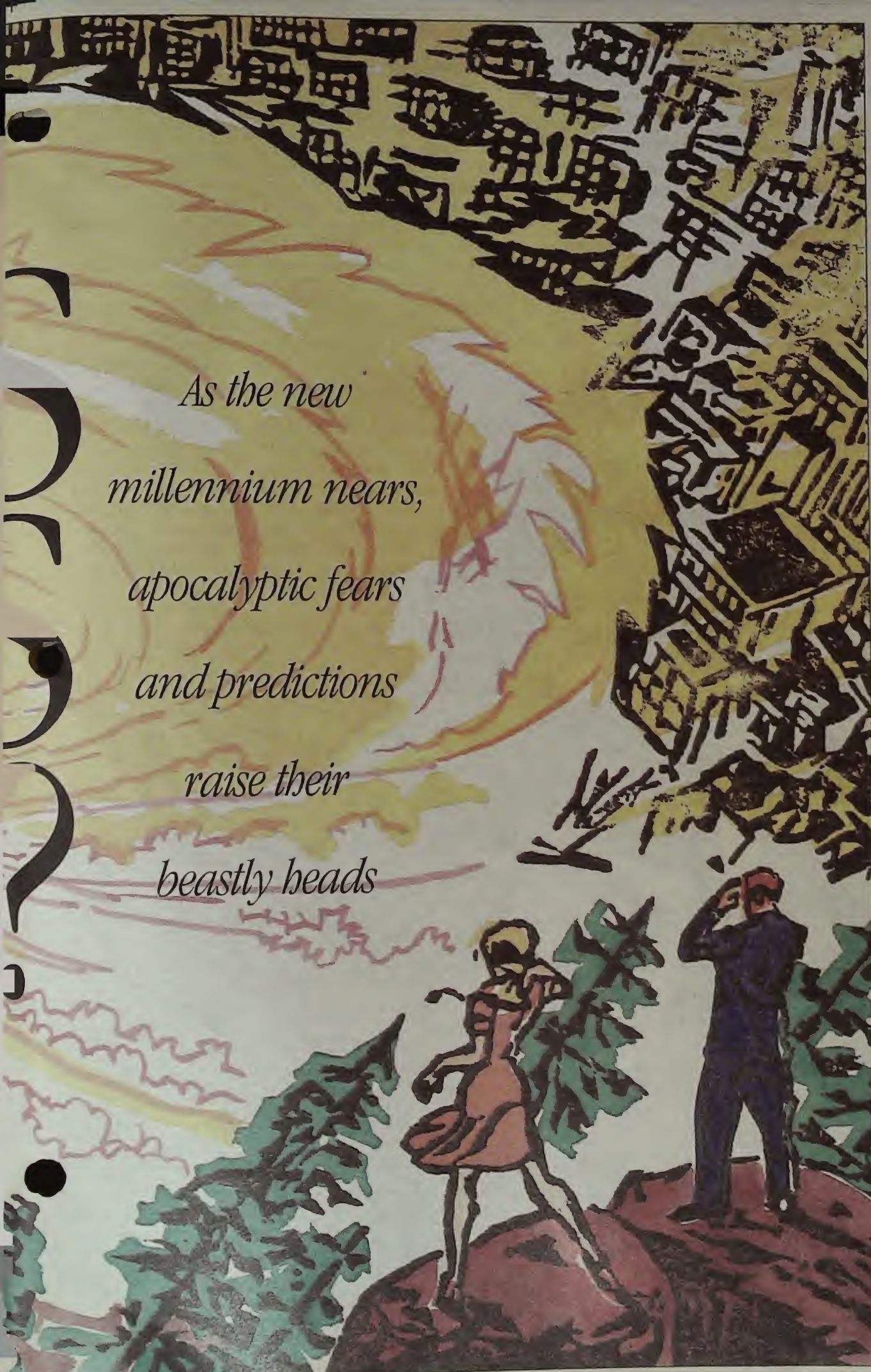
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THE IT



*As the new
millennium nears,
apocalyptic fears
and predictions
raise their
beastly heads*

By David Crumm
Free Press Religion Writer

The end must
be near.
Jesus has
been sending me warnings in
the mail for several years
now, and I think he's getting
pretty angry. His letters are
neatly typed, but they're brief
and blunt. Jesus says he wants
all weapons destroyed, vio-
lence eliminated from TV and
movies, and all alcoholic bev-
erages banned.

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Illustration
John Hart

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

In a recent note, Jesus warned: "Each thought and action on Earth is predetermined by one Omnipotent God!"

I'm not quite sure what that means, but it sounds scary — especially since I also got a letter from an anonymous man in Arkansas predicting that a horrible satanic beast soon would be unleashed on the Earth.

At least the Arkansas letter offered this helpful tip: "NEVER NEVER NEVER TAKE THE MARK OF THE BEAST! YOU MAY STARVE TO DEATH, YOU MAY BE TORTURED TO DEATH, FEARFULLY MUTILATED. But these tortures can be only for a short time. But if you take the Mark of the Beast, you're headed for THE LAKE OF FIRE — AND IT WILL BE FOREVER."

That letter arrived about the same time someone in Illinois sent me a stunning chart on a single piece of paper 3 feet wide and 10 feet long. It was a kind of complicated time line with lots of numbers and arrows, surrounded by thousands of tiny words and one major conclusion: The world is going to end on Oct. 9, 2000.

But I'm a little skeptical.

Most of the notes Jesus sends these days are signed with a cheap blue ballpoint pen. They're all postmarked Manasota, Fla., which may be a nice place to retire but certainly isn't Heaven.

In the letter from Arkansas, half the words were scrawled with a fat felt-tipped marker by a

hand that appears to have been more disturbed than enlightened.

And that bedsheet-sized chart? Well, except for that big date in the year 2000, it is next to impossible to understand.

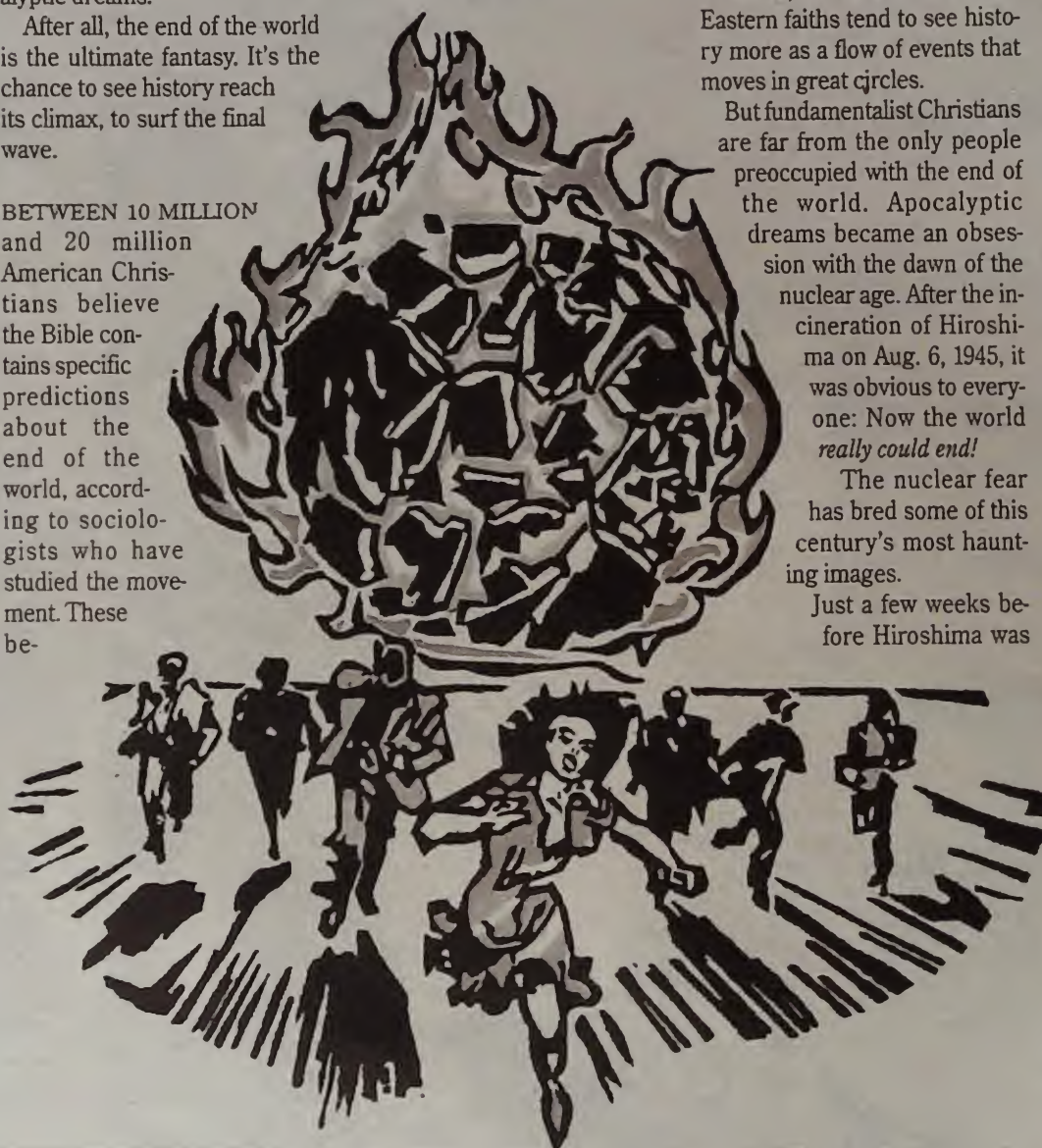
Some people are clearly getting carried away. In their fascination with the coming turn of the millennium, they're stirring up an intoxicating brew of apocalyptic dreams.

After all, the end of the world is the ultimate fantasy. It's the chance to see history reach its climax, to surf the final wave.

BETWEEN 10 MILLION and 20 million American Christians believe the Bible contains specific predictions about the end of the world, according to sociologists who have studied the movement. These be-

"We are fast approaching the Apocalypse — a dark age when the forgotten ones will return to seize control of the Earth and our minds once again — seize control of every living thing."

— "2000 A.D." COMICS



lievers like to keep one eye on the scriptures and one eye on the skies, from whence they believe the returned Christ will emerge.

Other world faiths have apocalyptic theories, too. However, the year 2000 is not triggering any great expectations in most of these faiths. Muslims and Jews follow their own calendars. For Jews, this year is 5754; for Muslims, it's 1414. Followers of Eastern faiths tend to see history more as a flow of events that moves in great circles.

But fundamentalist Christians are far from the only people preoccupied with the end of the world. Apocalyptic dreams became an obsession with the dawn of the nuclear age. After the incineration of Hiroshima on Aug. 6, 1945, it was obvious to everyone: Now the world really could end!

The nuclear fear has bred some of this century's most haunting images.

Just a few weeks before Hiroshima was

devastated, Robert Oppenheimer stood in a New Mexico desert grimly watching as his years of frantic scientific search reached fruition in the world's first atomic blast. He murmured a phrase from the ancient Hindu scriptures: "I am become death, the destroyer of worlds."

By the 1960s, Cold War fears were so oppressive that many people felt there was nothing left to do but laugh at the absurdity of life and death.

Stanley Kubrick picked beloved character actor Slim Pickens to finish off the world in his 1964 satirical hit "Dr. Strangelove."

"Well, boys, I reckon this is it!" says Pickens, who plays Major Kong, the captain of a U.S. bomber ordered to detonate two atomic bombs in Russia. "It's nuclear combat toe-to-toe with the Rooskies!"

In the end, Pickens climbs down into the plane's bomb bay and throws his legs around the end of one big bomb — ready to rock with the ultimate bucking bronco. Man and bomb fall into the sky over Russia. All the way to Armageddon, Pickens waves his cowboy hat and screams at the top of his lungs: "Waaaaaaaah-hooooooo!"

Since the end of the Cold War, people are less afraid of a nuclear holocaust, but with the year 2000 looming, more and more people are thinking about the End again. The idea has spread throughout our culture.

IN SEARCH OF THE LATEST apocalyptic scenarios, I went to a

APOCALYPSE WHEN??

Down through the centuries, apocalyptic predictions have thrilled, terrorized — and seriously disappointed — the people who placed their bets on them. There have been dozens of intrepid prognostications in the 20th Century alone. This time line shows some of the most famous.



1st Century

Many leaders of the early Christian church thought Christ would come back again quickly. They expected to live to see it.



500

Hippolytus, a Christian leader who died in 236, based his prediction on the dimensions of Noah's

ILLUSTRATIONS - STEPHEN SCHUDLICH

place that's always on the cutting edge: Ann Arbor.

First, I tried the Shaman Drum Bookshop, which specializes in such weighty topics as philosophy, changing culture and religious studies.

Visiting Shaman Drum is a bit like climbing a Tibetan mountain to ask a guru for the secret of life. The shop's narrow doorway is nearly hidden on State Street. Even if you find it, there's a long, steep staircase to survive before you reach the books.

Gasping, I wandered into the den-like little shop and found a cheery young man, Curt Holtz, who seemed to know all about apocalyptic concerns.

"Everyone's thinking about it now, aren't they?" he said. "I think it's an all-pervasive theme these days. Postmodernism and this theme of dissolution. The idea that the world has lost its center. This sense that the world lacks coherence — that a lot of crazy things are going on."

He ushered me past a table displaying a giant picture book with photos of dying rain forests and disappearing native villages. The cover proclaimed: "Endangered Peoples."

He wanted to show me some massive, scholarly books whose basic idea is that the modern world has gotten itself into very deep trouble — and that economists, philosophers and social thinkers need to abandon many of the basic assumptions that have brought the planet to the brink of disaster.

"It's a massive field of study that keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger," Holtz said,

hefting a postmodernist tome called "A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia."

He looked at me carefully, as if assessing my scholarly abilities; then he looked doubtfully down at the thick book. Finally, he shoved it back onto the shelf.

"No, I don't think you'd want to read that," he said. "This is a highly technical field — and some of these books are incomprehensible."

Seeking simpler language, I left the bookstore and walked down the street to Dave's Comics. Cartoon versions of the apocalypse were everywhere.

Shoulder-to-shoulder with Batman and Superman were stacks of comics starring Evil Ernie, a super-powered mass murderer in a horrifying adventure called "Halloween Apocalypse/The End Is Near"; Ms. Mystic, who tries to harness natural forces to preserve the Earth from disaster in "Deathwatch 2000"; and Saint Sinner, a super hero struggling to resolve his good and evil urges on the brink of the apocalypse.

In many of these new comics, the End is played for laughs.

The hero of "Kid Eternity" comics is an easygoing, long-haired super hero who wears dark glasses everywhere — and embodies all of the powerful mysteries that swirl around the end of the world. One hiccup from Kid Eternity, and the world could fly into chaos.

The basic message of these comics is: It's a blast to hang around the apocalypse.

Thousands of people even play apocalyptic games at home.

"A spiral of social breakdown, environmental destruction and migration could occur and seems already to have begun in some areas. ... The chief obstacle is the failure of the human vision of the human purpose."

— GERALD BARNEY, "GLOBAL 2000 REVISITED: WHAT SHALL WE DO?" REPORT PREPARED FOR THE 1993 PARLIAMENT OF WORLD'S RELIGIONS

I discovered this at Rider's Hobby Shop, just a few blocks away from the comic store. Sophisticated role-playing games include instruction manuals that often run longer than 200 pages. Players use the manuals to design the individual characters they will play in a game. Groups of players organize themselves, like actors, into the casts of long-running games that are played out like the improvised chapters

in a soap opera once or twice a week over many months.

"There's a whole genre of these games, called 'Cyberpunk,'" said Dean Martelle, Rider's assistant manager. The genre is named for the most famous apocalyptic role-playing game, which is subtitled "The Role-Playing Game of the Dark Future."

"When the Cyberpunk game first came out around 1987, we

literally couldn't keep it on the shelves," Martelle said. "The whole Cyberpunk scenario is sort of like the apocalypse in slow motion."

No nuclear holocaust. No second coming of Christ. No aliens suddenly blasting the planet. Just the world falling apart in the year 2020, into what the game manual describes as "a violent, dangerous place, filled with people who'd love to rip your arm off and eat it. The traditional concepts of good and evil are replaced by the values of expedience: You do what you have to do to survive. If you can do some good along the way, great."

"But don't count on it."

The original Cyberpunk game was designed by California-based game inventor Mike Pondsmith. He wanted to recreate the mood of a movie that has become the embodiment of Cyberpunk mythology: "Blade Runner." The 1982 film cast Harrison Ford as Deckard, a hard-fisted Los Angeles cop who tracks down renegade robots in the year 2019.

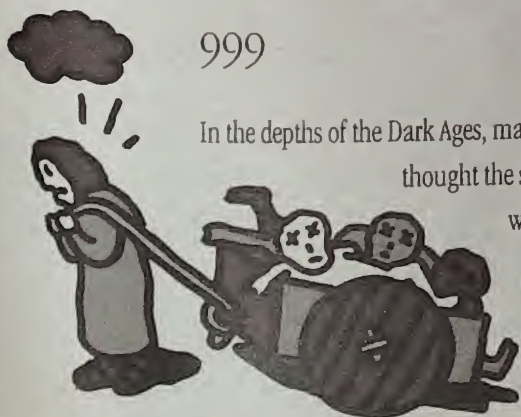
When mild-mannered Dean Martelle leaves his game shop to join in a Cyberpunk game with friends, he transforms himself into the powerful, clever Tracy Hanover, a 21st Century spy.

"I'm mostly human, but with cybernetic modifications," Martelle explained. "The character is supposed to be a kind of private investigator, so one of the eyes has been replaced with a high-resolution digital camera,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

999

In the depths of the Dark Ages, many people thought the sinful planet would never make it to a second millennium.



1524-26

German peasants revolted against the nobility when a peasant leader, Thomas Muntzer, preached that the apocalypse was at hand.



1533

German preacher Melchior Hoffman predicted the world would end and he and Christ would be carried through the sky on a bank of clouds. Many of his followers gave away their possessions and were highly perturbed when 1534 rolled around.

SWAN SONGS

When it's time to face the music:



"(TONIGHT WE'RE GONNA PARTY LIKE IT'S) 1999," Prince, 1982.

"IN THE YEAR 2525," Zager and Evans, 1969.

"QUE SERA, SERA," Doris Day, 1956.

"PEOPLE GET READY," Impressions, 1965.

"NOWHERE TO RUN," Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, 1965.

"(THERE'S GOT TO BE A) MORNING AFTER," Maureen McGovern, 1973.

"WE DIDN'T START THE FIRE," Billy Joel, 1989.

"WE'VE GOT TONITE (WHO NEEDS TOMORROW?)," Bob Seger, 1979.

"SLIPPIN' INTO DARKNESS," War, 1972.

"POP GOES THE WORLD," Men Without Hats, 1988.

"SOMETHING'S BURNING," Kenny Rogers and the First Edition, 1970.

"AIN'T NO SUNSHINE," Bill Withers, 1971.

"ANTICIPATION," Carly Simon, 1972.

"ARMAGEDDON IT," Def Leppard, 1989.

"BALL OF CONFUSION," Temptations, 1970.

"BLINDED BY THE LIGHT," Manfred Mann's Earth Band, 1977.

"EVE OF DESTRUCTION," Barry McGuire, 1965.

"THE END OF THE WORLD," Skeeter Davis, 1963.

"FINAL COUNTDOWN," Europe, 1987.

"TIME HAS COME TODAY," Chambers Brothers, 1968.

"HEAVEN HELP US ALL," Stevie Wonder, 1970.

"HELLO, GOODBYE," Beatles, 1967.

"HOW MANY TIMES CAN WE SAY GOODBYE," Dionne Warwick and Luther Vandross, 1983.

"THERE'S A KIND OF HUSH (ALL OVER THE WORLD TONIGHT)," Herman's Hermits, 1967; Carpenters, 1976.

"WHAT'S GOING ON," Marvin Gaye, 1971.

"IT'S OVER," Roy Orbison, 1964.

"WHAT NOW MY LOVE," Herb Alpert, Sonny and Cher, 1966.

"THERE GOES MY EVERYTHING," Engelbert Humperdinck, 1967.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

and the other one has been replaced with a video camera. So I can see out of both eyes, but if I'm tailing someone, or if I find information I need, I can also take pictures or record video through my eyes whenever I want. It's a good idea for the character to wear some body armor and to carry some weapons: a Browning Ultra-Power (pistol) with a laser sight, and the other thing is a Narco-Jet Pistol with a laser sight. The Narco-Jet fires knock-out drugs — you get hit with that, and two or three seconds later, you're out like a light."

Martelle's alter ego may sound strange at first, but his role-playing fantasies don't seem too different from the longings of Edward Koval, a retired Toledo firefighter I talked with a few days later.

Both men fantasize about a new kind of world in which they are given powerful new minds and bodies.

The big difference is that Koval is a fundamentalist Christian who is convinced that the apocalypse is at hand. Koval is so certain of this that, since 1988, he has spent thousands of dollars from his savings to buy advertisements in the Toledo Blade warning people about Christ's second coming.

In Koval's view, Christ is coming back very soon to take his devout followers into heaven, an event called the Rapture. Once these believers are safely tucked away, the rest of the world will go through seven years of terrible violence. Finally, Christ will step into the world once more, and, this time, he will completely transform the Earth. The result will be a perfect kingdom where Christ will reign — along with the hosts of Christian believers — for 1,000 years.

Koval's heart is set on making it into that millennial kingdom.

"Our bodies are going to be changed," Koval said. "We're going to have resur-

rected bodies. Just like the ugly caterpillar goes through a metamorphosis, our bodies will be made so much better. There will be no more pain. ... We're going to have more wisdom, the wisdom of Solomon. And, according to how obedient we have been as servants, we are going to be given new authority. ... There will be no bad government in the kingdom — I'll tell you that right now. Jesus will reign, and he will change everything. He's going to do away with polluted water and clean up the environment. Even the animal kingdom will be changed. The wolves will live peacefully with the lambs."

The picture may sound perfect, but many people warn that all of this apocalyptic thinking could be self-fulfilling.

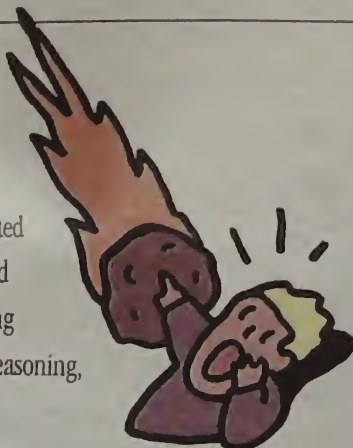
"It's a dangerous kind of thinking. It's an excuse for people to act really shitty to each other because they think they won't be here on the planet much longer," said Cherie Charbeneau, a woman I met in the most peaceful of the stops on my apocalyptic pilgrimage. Charbeneau is a manager in a book and gift shop in downtown Ann Arbor that specializes in hopeful visions of the future: books on saving the Earth, on attaining peace through meditation, on struggling for human rights, on defending native peoples and even on having better sex. She is so wary of people who are cheering for the apocalypse that she asked me not to mention the name of her shop in this article.

If people become obsessed with apocalyptic visions, Charbeneau said, "they start to think, 'It doesn't make any difference if I pour this mercury into the lakes, because nobody's going to be here tomorrow to eat these fish.'"

The Earth would be healthier if more people thought about its long-term future, she believes. "When you start thinking about the future, then you start to think about your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. And you start to be

1719

Swiss mathematician Jakob Bernoulli calculated that a huge comet would cause an earth-shattering explosion in 1719. His reasoning, however, didn't add up.



1736

William Whiston announced that, preparatory to the end of the world, London was about to be destroyed. Panicked Londoners flocked to the countryside. Nothing else happened. Parisians were keenly disappointed.



Late 1700s

English mystic Ann Lee — founder of what became the Shaker movement — preached that men and women should start living celibate lives in order to prepare for the end.

more careful about what you put into the water, because you know they'll have to drink it."

But even Charbeneau, when she looks deeply into her own future, admits that she has some of her own apocalyptic nightmares.

"I look at the earthquakes and fires and volcanic eruptions all around the world. I see this as evidence of Mother Earth trying

"First there was the collapse of civilization: anarchy, genocide, starvation. Then, when it seemed things couldn't get any worse — we got the plague, the living death, quickly closing its fist over the entire planet. ... I love the misery!"

— MOVIE NARRATOR, "CYBORG"

ing to shake off the too many people who are living on her surface," she said. "Sometimes I wonder whether humans will survive this, and I think we may not survive it."

BUT HOPE IS AS BASIC TO AMERICAN culture as freshly plowed fields in spring, the opening day of the baseball season and the inauguration of a new president. Americans can't resist stitching a silver lining into almost every doomsday cloud.

Millions of Christians from fundamentalist or Pentecostal churches don't see anything at all to fear if the world comes to an end. They believe they're bound for heavenly bliss. There are dozens of variations in the details of their end-times theories, but one thing they all agree on is that it will be the most glorious moment in their lives — the chance to write the final chapter of history with God.

Jack Van Impe, an apocalyptic TV evangelist

whose headquarters are in Rochester Hills, broadcasts that message nationwide in two half-hour TV shows each week. In an early December broadcast, Van Impe got so excited that he broke into a broad grin, punched his fist through the air and shouted, "Oh, folks, it's near! Jesus is coming soon! ... We're on the countdown!"

Even outside fundamentalist ranks, there are some rays of light in the apocalyptic nightmares.

Shaman Drum Bookshop salesman Curt Holtz is convinced that although the apocalyptic theories of postmodernism are on the cutting edge of our culture right now, it all could change within a decade.

"This isn't a static situation," he said. "The debate is constantly changing and evolving. Theoreticians say one thing, then within 10 years another whole group of thinkers come along and change the whole debate. It's great for bookstores. We can sell people a whole set of books now — then, 10 years later, there will be more books to buy."

Meanwhile, the creator of Cyberpunk has developed a hopeful sequel to his original game. In the new game, "Cybergeneration," idealistic youths hope to fix up the badly damaged 21st Century world they have inherited from their parents.

Which is just fine with game player Dean Martelle. The Cyberpunk world may be a nice place to play in, Martelle said, but no one really wants to live there.

"With some of the things we see happening in the world now, we're afraid that we could be headed toward a Cyberpunk future — but it's definitely something we don't want to see happen," he said. "It's fun to play the games, but most of us hope we will see a more benevolent world." ■

MORE MILLENNIAL MULLINGS,
PAGES 16-18



LAST PICTURE SHOWS

Lights, camera, apocalypse:

- "DR. STRANGELOVE," 1964: Peter Sellers and the Doomsday Machine.
- "ON THE BEACH," 1959: Radioactive cloud descends on Australia and the last enclave of humanity.
- "THE DAY AFTER," made-for-TV, 1983: Immediate aftermath of a nuclear strike.
- "TESTAMENT," 1983: Jane Alexander sees the world succumb to a minutes-long nuclear war.
- "THE DAY THE EARTH CAUGHT FIRE," 1962: Earth on a collision course with the sun.
- "HOLOCAUST 2000," 1978: Antichrist plans to destroy the world with nuclear reactors.
- "THE QUIET EARTH," 1985: Scientist wakes up to find all people and animals gone.
- "NIGHT OF THE COMET," 1984: World's last bad guys chase world's last teenage girls through department stores.
- "PHOENIX THE WARRIOR," 1987: Germ warfare has wiped out all the men, so women do battle.
- "LAST MAN ON EARTH," 1964: Plague reduces the human race to bloodsucking walking dead; remake "THE OMEGA MAN," 1971.
- "VIRUS," 1980: Gaggles of humanity on a polar expedition survive after germs destroy civilization.
- "THE AFTERMATH," 1981: Astronauts return to Earth and battle the crazed remnants of society; remake "SURVIVOR," 1987.
- "A BOY AND HIS DOG," 1976: Don Johnson and pooch wander the planet after a nuclear holocaust.
- "DAMNATION ALLEY," 1977: Familiar Hollywood types wander the planet after a nuclear holocaust.
- "WARRIORS OF THE APOCALYPSE," 1985: Wandering survivors find a jungle society ruled by women with men as slaves.
- "BLADE RUNNER," 1982: Harrison Ford fights rebellious robots in an eerie future cityscape.
- "CYBORG," 1989: Post-apocalypse soldier of misfortune does escort duty for a valued robot.
- "MAD MAX," 1979; "ROAD WARRIOR," 1981; "MAD MAX BEYOND THUNDER DOME," 1985: Mel Gibson in a future without oil.
- "THE RAPTURE," 1991: Hedonist joins a religious sect and journeys into the desert to await Judgment Day.
- "HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY," 1985: Everyman wanders the universe after escaping destruction of Earth by aliens.
- "PLANET OF THE APES," 1968; "BENEATH THE PLANET OF THE APES," 1970; "ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE APES," 1972; "CONQUEST OF THE PLANET OF THE APES," 1972; "BATTLE FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES," 1973: The score? Monkeys 5, Humans 0.

1843-44

New York evangelical preacher William Miller predicted the world would end in 1843. Then he changed it to 1844. Some Miller followers regrouped and formed what is now the Seventh-day Adventist Church.



1908

Pennsylvania grocery store owner Lee Spangler sparked a panic with his claim that the world would end in a huge fire in October 1908. His prediction came from a trance he'd had at age 12. Puberty can be like that.



1925

Archangel Gabriel appeared in California, predicting the world's end in February, according to a girl named Margaret Rowan. Long Island house painter Robert Reidt led a group of people to dress in white robes and climb up a hill to chant: "Gabriel! Gabriel!" Gabriel kept his distance.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Here are the 10 most famous passages from the Apocalypse of John, the book of the Bible most often cited as a source of predictions about the end of the world:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. **(3:20)**

And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. **(5:1)**

So I looked and behold: A pale horse. And the name of Him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with Him. **(6:8)**

They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat. **(7:16)**

And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch. ... The name of the star is Wormwood. **(8:10-11)**

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out. **(12:7-9)**

(The beast) causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. ... His number is 666. **(13:16-18)**

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. ... Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **(21:1)**

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. **(21:4)**

I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. **(22:13)**

MIDNIGHT, DEC. 31, 999

*Here's what happened the last time
they thought it was the last time*

THE LAST TIME THE world faced the dawn of a millennium, thousands of people were in a panic, convinced the planet would dissolve into ashes at midnight on the last day of 999. Others were certain New Year's Day, 1000, would see the second coming of Christ.

None of them got it right, of course. The second millennium, which will end in about six years, began pretty much the way the first one ended: with the western world mired in the misery that today we call the Dark Ages. Europe was ravaged by invasions and internal wars, disease was rampant, the rich were very rich, and the poor — that is, most people — were very, very poor and often helpless victims of the violence around them.

"Christian barons slaughtered each other with a vengeance. ... In Rome, rival popes imprisoned, starved, mutilated, castrated, blinded and assassinated each other," historian Richard Erdoes writes in his 1988 book "A.D. 1000: Living on the Brink of Apocalypse."

He paints a picture of a world so bleak and troubled that its in-

habitants almost looked forward to being destroyed on the 1,000th anniversary of Christianity. Thousands made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, thinking the second coming would likely come there. Thousands more journeyed to Rome to be at St. Peter's Basilica for a mass to be celebrated by the pope at the big moment.

Erdoes' book deals mainly with events in Europe, relying in part on the medieval writings of Raoul Glaber, described by Erdoes as a "restless insufferable monk" of the times, who wrote as he moved from one monastery to another, usually at the request of the ruling abbots. It was Glaber who observed of the pilgrims: "Every phenomenon of nature filled them with alarm. A thunderstorm sent them all upon their knees in mid-march. It was the opinion that thunder was the voice of God announcing the Day of Judgment."

Other signs made the end seem inevitable, too. Italy's Vesuvius volcano erupted. Great fires ravaged Italy and France, and one widely told tale was that in a church somewhere in Europe, an image of Christ had begun

weeping crimson tears. A wolf crept into the church to worship the image; it rang the bell rope with its teeth, the legend had it.

Other historians doubt that the entire planet was seized by such millennial hysteria, since not everyone was on the same calendar back then. Many folks, in fact, had no calendar at all. These historians also say stories about the events of the 10th Century did not really appear until hundreds of years later, leading to speculation that they were written to discredit the beliefs of the Middle Ages.

According to Erdoes, Pope Sylvester "stood motionless, arms upraised," as he concluded mass at exactly midnight to end 999.

As church bells tolled the fateful hour, "the multitude stood for a moment transfixed, but, in the twinkling of an eye, was swept away in a frenzy of universal joy. ... Humanity had been given a new lease on life upon an earth reborn. The year of fear and trembling had passed."

Whew!

By Ron Dzwonkowski



Oct. 30, 1938

Hundreds of radio listeners feared that an invasion of aliens was bringing the world to an end when they tuned in to Orson Welles' dramatization of "War of the Worlds."



June 28, 1954

On June 27, Hector Cox, a regular soapbox speaker in London's Hyde Park, made headlines by predicting that the world would end within 24 hours. He was partially right. The next day, someone stabbed him to death.

' L A T E G R E A T '

Hal Lindsey

Hundreds of people have confessed to Hal Lindsey that they picked up his venerable best-seller, "The Late Great Planet Earth," thinking it was a science fiction story about the end of the world.

It is not science, and it is not fiction. Not yet, anyway.

"Late Great" is Lindsey's view of things to come, the end of the world we know and the dawn of a new order with the second coming of Christ. The book is based on biblical prophecies that Lindsey sees being played out in modern-day events, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the emergence of China as a world power.

Lindsey was not the first to see such things, but his book — perhaps because of the intriguing title, perhaps because of its plainspoken, convincing style — is where many people first learned of them.

Zondervan Publishing House of Grand Rapids printed the original "Late Great" in 1970 and has sold 10 million copies of what is still its most successful title. The Bantam paperback edition has been through more than 40 printings, racking up another 18 million in sales.

Not a bad writing debut for a former Louisiana tugboat captain who was persuaded to become an author by his audiences on the Campus Crusade for Christ circuit in 1969.

"I'm not a prophet," the 64-year-old Lindsey said in a telephone interview from the Palos Verdes, Calif., headquarters of Hal Lindsey Ministries, point of origin for his weekly broadcasts to 98 radio and TV stations (none in Michigan). "I certainly have never claimed to speak directly from God. I am an interpreter of Bible prophecy. ... I don't claim to be infallible, but I believe I was inspired to write it."



Lindsey said world events since "Late Great" was published have only reinforced his belief that he is correctly interpreting the prophecies.

For instance, his book was written when the Soviet Union was a world power, yet he specifically refers to only "the Russians" forming an alliance with Arab nations to attack Israel. This alliance, Lindsey writes, will be a key event in the sequence leading to the rise of an Antichrist from western Europe and a final battle of Armageddon before Christ returns to establish a 1,000-year kingdom on Earth.

In the breakup of the Soviet Union, almost 20 years after Lindsey's writing, Russia has become a separate nation and the most powerful of the former Soviet republics.

"What we have now is a maverick regional power that is in possession of one of the world's great arsenals," Lindsey said. "This fulfills exactly what Ezekiel, Chapter 38, predicted — not a world conqueror but a formidable regional power attacking Israel."

Lindsey — who is at work on a sequel, "Planet Earth, 2000 A.D.: Will Mankind Survive?" — believes the Antichrist is alive somewhere now, and "we're in the generation" that will see the beginning of the end of human history. He is often asked for a timetable but does not get into specific dates or attach great importance to the year 2000. "The millennium is interesting," Lindsey said, "but not nearly as significant as the events that are being shaped." ■

By Ron Dzwonkowski

1988

Scottish new age devotee Benjamin Creme claims that the "end" of the world — called the Maitreya — made a miraculous appearance in Kenya in 1988 and has been slowly transforming the Earth for the better ever since. A lot of people would like to see a little more evidence of that transformation.

Early 1990s

New age guru Elizabeth Clare Prophet drew hundreds to Montana to build massive bomb shelters in expectation of an apocalyptic event.



Oct. 28, 1992

In Korea, 20,000 followers of the Mission for the Coming Days church attended doomsday services, expecting Christ to return and take them to heaven. Many had quit their jobs or sold their homes. The next day, furious church members threw hymn books at their ministers and beat up at least two of them.

WAY TO GO

Let's face it: The world — or at least life as we know it — could end in any number of scientifically possible ways, apart from the cataclysmic righteousness of returning deities. Which of the alternatives below most appeals to the worry-wart in you?

- **BIG BANG.** An explosion from the core, like what happened to Krypton as Superman was leaving. Popular imagery, but unlikely.
- **BIG CHILL.** A new Ice Age. They are cyclical, and the last one ended 15,000 years ago. Scientists say the next one could be here anytime in the next 2,000-10,000 years.
- **BIG HEAT.** Which could also mean the **BIG FLOOD.** If the rate at which people burn fossil fuels continues to increase at about 4 percent a year, look for a 6-degree rise in global temperatures by 2030. Much warmer, and the polar ice caps will begin melting, which would radically alter world geography.
- **BIG BURNOUT.** The death of the sun, which is inevitable. But not to worry. Our source of light, heat and energy is 5 billion years old and thought to have enough fuel to carry on for another 8 billion or so.
- **BIG BUMP.** Collision with another large object. Scientists say it would take an intruder from outside our solar system to disrupt the orbits that keep planets apart. A direct hit by an asteroid would be devastating, but the closest recent one, in 1937, missed by 500,000 miles. The odds are 400 million to 1 against a direct hit by the icy head of a comet, and the largest meteorite recorded as striking Earth was 66 tons — a mere trifle, really.
- **BIG HOOVER.** Being sucked into a black hole. The closest known one is 6 quadrillion miles away, but everything in the universe is constantly moving, so one of these dense, dead stars, with its immense gravitational pull, could sneak up on us.
- **BIG WAR.** But even after a major exchange of atomic bombs, scientists believe enough people would survive to repopulate the planet. No telling, though, what kind of world they'd have left. If you watch enough movies, you know it would be a dry, dirty, violent, primitive place. Kind of like America's cities.
- **BIG DRAIN.** Exhaustion. We'll just use the place up. Too many people, not enough food, not enough clean water, not enough good air. The whole ecological nightmare, not an overnight event, and an avoidable catastrophe, at least.
- **BIG BUG.** Disease. There's plenty of incurable, deadly stuff out there. But a plague capable of wiping out humanity would have to be a hardy, fast-traveling virus or bacteria and not preventable.
- **BIG GOOF-UP.** Accident. Somebody screws something up, with catastrophic results for everyone else, most likely bumping the button that launches a nuclear first strike (see Big War, above).

By Ron Dzwonkowski

Billy Graham Joins the Doomsday Chorus

AT 75, BILLY GRAHAM seems to be a warm, avuncular guy, preaching soothing sermons about overcoming pain or life's other problems.

Recently, however, Graham has joined the chorus of preachers talking about frightening events expected in the near future. In 1992, he described his dark visions in a book, "Storm Warning."

He bluntly describes his hope that the looming Judgment Day will be a victory for Christians: "For the Christian believer, the return of Christ is comforting, for at last men and women of faith will be exonerated. They will be avenged. The nonbeliever will see and understand why true Christians marched to the sound of a another drum. But for the sinful unbeliever, the triumphant return of Christ will

prove disastrous, because Christ's return ensures final judgment."

Graham won't set a date but insists the final judgment is not far away: "I do not want to linger here on the who, what, why, how or when of Armageddon. I will simply state my own belief that it is near. ... Without a sudden and massive worldwide revival of God's people and a return to the morality and the values set down in the Word of God, Earth is already under the condemnation of God, and its judgment will be swift, unavoidable and total."

"In the face of this coming storm, we have only one sure hope: Armageddon will be interrupted by the return of Jesus Christ on the white horse leading the armies of heaven, as clearly prophesied in many Bible passages."

By David Crumm

Native Americans Warn: Mother Earth Will Clean House

IN TRADITIONAL NATIVE American religions, the Earth moves through cycles of birth, death and rebirth. The Earth is a spiritual mother with the power to cleanse herself. Many seers believe the Earth Mother plans a major housecleaning very soon.

Chippewa medicine man Sun Bear has written: "There is nothing wrong with the Earth Mother that can't be cured by removing the goofy people who are creating the problems upon her." In specific predictions for various parts of the world, he writes: "I foresee most of the Midwest eventually becoming a desert area. ... In Michigan: This state has many good areas. Stay away from Detroit. Watch for rising water levels on the Great Lakes."

Sioux leader Vine Deloria Jr. has said: "It will be some utterly simple thing that finally triggers the collapse of our civilization — a computer chip, a broken water pipe, a blown fuse. We have made ourselves so dependent upon our networks and institutions that we cannot function without them."

"We should hope that somewhere in the backwaters of the planet, a few people who know our story will survive and pass it along as legends in the way that Atlantis has been preserved. We may someday be remembered as a mythical golden age when people flew through the skies in big silver birds. It probably is more than we deserve."

By David Crumm

April 1993



David Koresh's ravings near the end of his reign in Waco, Texas, suggested the end was at hand. For many of his followers, he was tragically correct. On April 19, Koresh and most of his Branch Davidians perished in a fire as federal agents prepared to storm his compound.



2000

16th Century seer Nostradamus wrote: "In the year 1999 and seven months, the King of Terror will come from the sky."

Twice a week, Troy evangelist Jack Van Impe airs his speculations about Christ's return on Channel 62 and other stations nationwide. Van Impe insists Christ is coming soon — probably around the year 2000.

Sources include: "The People's Almanac: The Book of Predictions"; "Doomsday" by Russell Chandler; The Encyclopaedia Britannica; Free Press staff and wire reports.